

Thomas Jefferson to Joel Barlow, May 3, 1802, from The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO JOEL BARLOW¹

¹ From the *Historical Magazine*, V., 89.

Washington, May 3, 1802.

Dear Sir, —I have doubted whether to write to you, because yours of Aug. 25, received only March 27, gives me reason to expect you are now on the ocean. However, as I know voyages so important are often delayed, I shall venture a line with Mr. Dupont de Nemours. The Legislature rises this day. They have carried into execution steadily almost all the propositions submitted to them in my message at the opening of the session. Some few are laid over for want of time. The most material of which is the militia, the plan of which they cannot easily modify to the general approbation. Our majority in the House of Representatives has been about two to one—in the Senate, eighteen to fourteen. After another election it will be two to one in the Senate, and it would not be for the public good to have it greater, a respectable minority is useful as censors. The present one is not respectable; being the bitterest cup of the remains of Federalism rendered desperate and furious by despair. A small check in the tide of republicanism in Massachusetts, which has showed itself very unexpectedly at the late election, is not accounted for. Everywhere else we are becoming one. In Rhode Island the late election gave us two to one through the whole state. Vermont is decidedly with us. It is said and believed that New Hampshire has got a majority of republicans now in its Legislature; and wanted a few hundreds only of turning out their federal governor. He goes assuredly the next trial. Connecticut is supposed to have gained for us about fifteen or twenty per cent, since her last election;

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but the exact issue is not yet known here. Nor is it certainly known how we shall stand in the House of Representatives of Massachusetts. In the Senate there, we have lost ground. The candid federalists acknowledged that their party can never more raise its head. The operations of this session of Congress, when known among the people at large, will consolidate them. We shall now be so strong that we shall certainly split again; for freemen thinking differently and speaking and acting as they think, will form into classes of sentiment, but it must be under another name, that of federalism

is to become so scouted that no party can rise under it. As the division between whig and tory is founded in the nature of men, the weakly and nerveless, the rich and the corrupt seeing more safety and accessibility in a strong executive; the healthy, firm and virtuous feeling confidence in their physical and moral resources, and willing to part with only so much power as is necessary for their good government, and therefore to retain the rest in the hands of the many, the division will substantially be into whig and tory, as in England, formerly. As yet no symptoms show themselves, nor will till after election.

I am extremely happy to learn that you are so much at your ease that you can devote the rest of your life to the information of others. The choice of a place of residence is material. I do not think you can do better than to fix here for a while, until you become Americanized and understand the map of the country. This may be considered as a pleasant country-residence, with a number of neat little villages scattered around within the distance of a mile and a half, and furnishing a plain and substantially good society. They have begun their buildings in about four or five different points, at each of which there are buildings enough to be considered as a village. The whole population is about six thousand. Mr. Madison and myself have cut out a piece of work for you, which is to write the history of the United States, from the close of the War downwards. We are rich ourselves in materials, and can open all the public archives to you; but your residence here is essential, because a great deal of the knowledge of things is not on paper, but only within ourselves for verbal communication. John Marshall is writing the life of Gen. Washington from his papers. It is intended to come out just in time to influence the

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next presidential election. It is written therefore principally with a view to electioneering purposes; but it will consequently be out in time to aid you with information as well as to point out the perversions of truth necessary to be rectified. Think of this, and agree to it, and be assured of my high esteem and attachment.

P.S. There is a most lovely seat adjoining this city on a hill commanding a most extensive view of the Potomac. On it there is a superb house, gardens &c., with thirty or forty acres of ground. It will be sold under circumstances of distress, and will probably go for half of what it cost. It was built by Gustavus Mort, who is dead, bankrupt, &c.